

August 1, 2011

Whitemud Equine learning centre launches new brand

Edmonton... The Whitemud Equine Learning Association (WELCA) recently unveiled its new brand, in anticipation of a capital fundraising campaign. The campaign will raise funds for redevelopment of the site's facilities into a world-class centre for equine learning, therapy, recreation and research.

"For more than a decade, WELCA has been quietly helping to develop people of strength and contributors to the Edmonton community," says Gord Blinston, WELCA Board Chairperson. "This campaign supports a growing equine industry and an increasing demand for equine programs."

WELCA is a non-profit organization. It is home to a herd of 30 well trained lesson horses, and offers a variety of riding and non-riding programs for people ages six to 65. Its programs benefit many Edmontonians including high-risk youth, aboriginal youth, war veterans, the physically and mentally disabled, and the elderly.

WELCA has been home to the Little Bits Therapeutic Riding Association for persons with disabilities for 36 years. Therapeutic riding offers children and adults with mental and physical special needs, a fun form of recreation which improves coordination, muscle strength and self-confidence. WELCA partners with therapists specializing in equine-assisted psychology services. Thirty per cent of WELCA riders have special needs.

WELCA has significant opportunities to deliver more programming, but is constrained by poor facilities. Existing facilities are old, stretched to capacity, and need upgrading.

"Major redevelopment to create new facilities for WELCA will enable it to meet the local growing demand for equine education, training and events," says Blinston. "Our goal is to build an outstanding public facility, open to anyone with an interest in horses, which offers high quality horse-related activities."

WELCA is located in the river valley park, along Fox Drive. Edmonton is the only Canadian city with these services so centrally located. It is one of the only places in North America where citizens can enjoy equine programming in a river valley park.

The River Valley Alliance has identified Whitemud and its need for redevelopment as an important project along Edmonton's river valley to help bring Edmontonians closer to nature.

The November 12, 2011 *Hoofbeats & Heartbeats Gala* is WELCA's major fundraising event. For more information, visit www.welca.ca.

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WELCA BACKGROUNDER

The Whitemud Equine Learning Centre (WELCA) partners with NAIT and other institutions for hands-on learning and research. Elementary, junior and senior high schools can access WELCA's herd for recreation and education programs, volunteer and work experience.

WELCA is situated on the site of the Keillor Cabins, originally farmed by local physician and alderman Dr. Frederick Keillor. For a century it has been a favourite year-round destination, inspiring generations of artists, athletes and visitors with friendly horses, historic log cabin, stone fence and stone house, indoor and outdoor riding arenas, barns and show grounds.

WELCA provides facilities for two major local equine events: the Edmonton Classic Horse Show and the River Valley Horse Show. The economic impact of all of Alberta's horse events and shows is over \$128 million per year. Along with these major events, WELCA facilities support several other local events and training opportunities.

Alberta is home to over 30 per cent of Canada's horses, and has the second highest population of adults and children involved in equestrian sports. The Edmonton region has a very high concentration of horse owners and a large horse population. Many industries exist in and around the province purely dedicated to agricultural pursuits related to horses.

While always strong, the last decade, has shown a rapid increase in involvement in equine activities by young girls. Research has shown this involvement results in improved academic performance and increased self-confidence.

The November 12, 2011 *Hoofbeats & Heartbeats* gala will raise funds for WELCA's new Centre for Equine Sport and Recreation. The evening includes dinner and live entertainment. There is also a silent and live auction.

For more information, visit www.welca.ca .

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